

Cheers replace bloodshed



PHOTO: REUTERS

FOOTBALL RETURNS: Supporters cheer during the Iraq soccer championship match between al-Quwa Jawiya and Al-Meena in Baghdad on July 15.

Football

REUTERS, Baghdad

More than 15,000 soccer fans braved the bloody mayhem caused by 10 suicide bombers across Baghdad on Friday to see the air force team al-Quwa Jawiya crowned Iraq's first champions since the fall of Saddam Hussein.

Many drove half the length of a nation ravaged by war to reach the capital's Shaab national stadium from Basra, only to see their port authority side Al-Meena lose to two second half goals.

For organisers of a tournament that pitted teams from rebel strongholds like Ramadi and Samarra against powerful clubs from the capital once favoured by Saddam's elite, the fact that it went ahead at all for the first time since the U.S. invasion of 2003 was a triumph.

"A lot of people didn't think we'd

be able to stage a championship at all," said Hussein Sayeed, chairman of the Iraqi soccer federation and a former captain of the national team.

"We had to make a go of it in difficult circumstances. It was a big responsibility. But all credit to the clubs, who had to deal with financial problems and look after their security when they travelled to away games."

State television screened the game live and, though the stadium was far from full, those present showed defiance by flying their banners, beating their drums and bawling out their chants.

It was a display that matched the passion of a country that has been gripped by football fever since its under-23 side reached the Olympic semi-final in Athens last year.

"We were a bit afraid on the way here because it is dangerous," said 21-year-old Meena fan Mohammed Qasim, who rented a bus with friends that left Basra at dawn.

"Thankfully there were a lot of army checkpoints and we got here safely."

"Sport is now the face of hope for the new Iraq," said Emad Nasir, spokesman for the Iraqi Olympic Committee.

That body was once run by Saddam's son Uday, who was notorious for beatings and other punishments handed out to Iraqi sportsmen who fell short.

To limit the number of games played and reduce the need for travel, this season's championship began with four regional leagues of nine teams each.

The top three in each qualified for a second round-robin stage before a final knockout round.

Al-Meena, the unfancied side from Iraq's southern second city, proved the dark horses, knocking out Baghdad's perennial champions al-Zawraa -- the only unbeaten side in the group stages -- in the semi-finals.

Baghdad-based al-Quwa Jawiya, who last won the championship in 1997, dominated the goalless first half but Meena came out livelier after the break only to find themselves behind to a Luay Salah strike just before the hour.

A second, through a Sajjad Abdul-Kathim own goal after a goalmouth scramble 10 minutes later all but finished the tie, although the southerners felt hard done by when they had a goal ruled out for offside nine minutes from the end.

The winners will receive 40 million dinars -- about 27,000 dollars: "This is what we can afford," said federation chief Sayeed.

"We hope that we can provide bigger prizes ... in future, like other countries."

"Thank God for this win," said air force player Hummam Saleh as the champions saluted their supporters.

"I'm planning on celebrating. But first I need a good rest."

Lysenko sets hammer best

BBC ONLINE

Russian Tatyana Lysenko has set down a marker for the World Athletics Championships in Finland with a new world record in the women's hammer.

The 22-year-old threw 77.06m at the Vladimir Kuts Memorial meeting in Moscow on Friday.

The result beat the old mark of 76.07 metres, set by Mihaela Melinte of Romania in 1999.

Lysenko equalled her domestic record of 75.95m on Wednesday at the Russian national championships.

England have

Australia on the field as long as possible.

"Even if England don't win the first two Tests, they need to make Australia's bowlers work hard. This might give England a chance as the series wears on."

Warne has been a thorn in England's side since bowling Mike Gatting with the 'ball of the century', his first delivery in Ashes cricket, at Old Trafford a decade ago.

And David said England would have to take the fight to the spinner.

"They have to be positive against Warne, which does not mean taking him on blindly. You must look to create scoring opportunities. If he gains the mental ascendancy over England early in the series, it will be difficult."

Series on Warne's mind

Meanwhile, in the same edition of the magazine, Kumble warned England against the dangers of over-attacking the field, saying Australia's powerful top-order required careful handling.

"To other teams, when you start a fresh spell, you invariably have attacking fields. But with Australia you have to think carefully about what you want to do and how you want to attack."

The first Ashes Test starts at Lord's on Thursday.

CA-BCCI work

Cup is not our priority right now, we are now focussed on doing well in the forthcoming Tests," Merriman said it was Australia's target to succeed in three Test series every year.

On the question of inducting new blood in the Australian team, the Cricket Australia chief said the country's selection committee had adopted a "phase-in/phase-out" policy by which new players would constantly come in as and when

Murali back with a bang

FROM PAGE 12

top score of 49 in Sri Lanka's first innings of 227.

It was, however, Muralitharan who stole the show, returning to his famed wicket-taking ways after finishing with 1-56 in the first innings.

The 31-year-old was Test cricket's most successful bowler with 532 wickets when he fell and injured his right shoulder during a Test match against South Africa at home last August.

The injury allowed Australian Shane Warne to skip past Muralitharan and the leg-spinner begins the Ashes series against England next week with a world record tally of 583 from 123 Tests.

Muralitharan now has 539 wickets from 92 games.

West Indian captain Shivnarine Chandernaul, the only experienced player in the depleted touring squad, played a lone hand for his team, returning unbeaten on 48.

SCOREBOARD

Final scorecard of the first Test between Sri Lanka and the West Indies which ended at the Sinhalese Sports Club in Colombo on Saturday:

WEST INDIES: First innings 285 (Chandernaul 69, Ramdin 56;

Malinga 4-71, Vaas 3-35)

SRI LANKA: First innings 227 (Vaas 49, Muralitharan 36; Lawson 4-59)

WEST INDIES: Second innings (overnight 59-6)

Joseph c Jayawardena b Muralitharan	2
Marshall lbw b Vaas	2
Morton lbw b Vaas	0
Deonarine lbw b Vaas	7
Chandernaul not out	48
Smith lbw b Vaas	0
Ramdin lbw b Muralitharan	11
Banks c Dilshan b Muralitharan	7
Powell c Jayawardena b Muralitharan	0
Best st Sangakkara b Muralitharan	27
Lawson c sub (Chandana) b Muralitharan	0
Extras: (b-8, nb-1)	9
Total: (All out in 60 overs)	113
Fall of wickets: 1-3, 2-3, 3-15, 4-21, 5-21, 6-48, 7-69, 8-69, 9-113	

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Vaas	18	9	15	4
Malinga	12	5	22	0
Muralitharan	21	9	36	6
Jayasuriya	6	1	20	0
Herath	3	0	12	0

SRI LANKA: Second innings

Jayasuriya c Marshall b Lawson	15
Atapattu c Ramdin b Lawson	28
Sangakkara c Joseph b Lawson	0
Jayawardena not out	41
Samaraweera lbw b Lawson	51
Dilshan not out	30
Extras: (lb-6, nb-3, w-1)	10

Total: (For 4 wkts in 38.3 overs) 175

Fall of wickets: 1-34, 2-34, 3-49, 4-135

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Powell	8	0	44	0
Lawson	12	2	43	4
Best	8.3	1	40	0
Banks	7	0	31	0
Smith	3	1	11	0

Result: Sri Lanka won by six wickets and take 1-0 lead in two-Test series.

Man-of-the-match: Chaminda Vaas.

Toss: West Indies.

Umpires: Simon Taufel (Australia) and Nadeem Ghauri (Pakistan)

Mohakhali beat

Chelsea coach Jose Mourinho said it will be both a pleasure and difficult to play against Champions League runner-up AC Milan in its first pre-season match, and a loss wouldn't worry him.

"To play against Milan is always a pleasure," Mourinho said during a conference call Thursday.

"It's always difficult, but it's always a pleasure."

On Wednesday, Milan and Chelsea released their rosters for the U.S. tour. The English champions will face Milan on July 24 in Foxboro, Massachusetts.

"You never like to lose, but sometimes it's not bad to lose," Mourinho added. "Especially if it is in pre-season training."

On July 27, the Chicago Fire will face Milan at Soldier Field in Chicago. Chelsea will meet DC United the following day at FedEx Field, home of the NFL's Washington Redskins.

Milan and Chelsea will then play again on July 31 in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

Selectors

keep quiet about their relationship in a series of threatening phone calls and text messages.

Warne hit rock-bottom after being given a 12-month suspension for taking a banned diuretic just before the 2003 World Cup.

Warne returned in March 2004 and in 16 subsequent Tests captured 92 wickets, more than anybody else in the period.

Never short on confidence, Warne declares Australia are firm favourites to retain the Ashes.

England have not beaten the Australians in a Test series since 1987 and that's how Warne wants to keep it.

"Over a period of time we win more times than we lose," Warne said.

"It will take a big effort by England to change that."

When Warne smashed Sri Lankan Muttiah Muralitharan's world wicket-taking record in India last October, Cricket Australia said in a tribute: "Shane's ability to dismiss all types of batsmen in a variety of conditions makes him one of the greatest bowlers in cricket's history."

"In addition to his feats on the ground, Shane has played a pivotal

Torino, Messina expelled from Serie A

REUTERS, Rome

Former champions Torino and Messina have been expelled from Serie A because of the poor state of their finances, a board meeting of the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) decided on Friday.

Both clubs have already indicated they will appeal in the law courts against any ban, which means that the case could rumble on until the start of next season on August 28.

"I'm not optimistic but I'm realistic and I think that we have all of the prerequisites to remain in Serie A," Torino chairman Tullio Romero told ANSA news agency.

Perugia and Salernitana will be barred from Serie B, and a number of clubs from Italy's lower division, because of their financial problems, the chairman of Italy's Football League Adriano Galliani told ANSA after the FIGC meeting.

Seven-times Italian champions Torino returned to Serie A after two years out of the top flight by beating Perugia over two legs of their promotion playoff last month.

Sicilian club Messina finished seventh last season in what was only their second campaign in Serie A, the first back in 1964/65.

If Messina lose their appeal, the club most likely to benefit is Bologna, who were relegated from Serie A with Brescia and Atalanta after losing a playoff against Parma at the end of the season.

Essien going to Chelsea?

SPORTINGLIFE, undated

Michael Essien claims to have been assured by Lyon that they will allow him to join Chelsea -- at the right price.

The French club's president, Jean-Michel Aulas, has publicly insisted that Essien is not for sale, but the Ghanaian midfielder insists that is not his private view.

Essien said in The Sun: "I know directors of both clubs are to see each other again in the next few days."

"I have the chairman's word that he will do everything to find an agreement with Chelsea as soon as possible."

Essien, 22, was sent off in Lyon's draw with Colombian side Once Caldas in South Korea on Friday.

He has been the subject of £17million and £18million bids from Chelsea already this summer, but Lyon are holding out for £30million, and the stalemate has left Essien frustrated.

Mourinho readies for Milan

AP, London

Chelsea coach Jose Mourinho said it will be both a pleasure and difficult to play against Champions League runner-up AC Milan in its first pre-season match, and a loss wouldn't worry him.

"To play against Milan is always a pleasure," Mourinho said during a conference call Thursday.

"It's always difficult, but it's always a pleasure."

On Wednesday, Milan and Chelsea released their rosters for the U.S. tour. The English champions will face Milan on July 24 in Foxboro, Massachusetts.

"You never like to lose, but sometimes it's not bad to lose," Mourinho added. "Especially if it is in pre-season training."

On July 27, the Chicago Fire will face Milan at Soldier Field in Chicago. Chelsea will meet DC United the following day at FedEx Field, home of the NFL's Washington Redskins.

Milan and Chelsea will then play again on July 31 in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

Milestone

role in revolutionising the art of leg-spin bowling, which has inspired a new generation of children to the craft."

Selectors

FROM PAGE 12

Ganguly issue," said Nair adding that it would be a 15-member squad that will leave for the island nation on July 23.

The team is to be selected on July 18.

It still remains unclear whether the Indian captain would be provisionally accommodated in the team pending a final verdict on the ban which was slapped on him for slow over rates during the one-day series against Pakistan at home in April this year.

Ganguly, who has already sat out for two matches, had his appeal against the ban turned down by ICC Appeals Commissioner Michael Beloff. The BCCI had taken up the issue to the ICC, disputing the process by which Ganguly's appeal was heard.

Sachs has given the ICC and the BCCI until July 20 to file the written submissions and further two days (July 22) to give their replies. He has not set a timeframe for his verdict.

"My prediction? 5-0," he said.

Pele's son cleared of manslaughter

Football

REUTERS, Sao Paulo

Police, Ivaneu Caires de Souza, says there is evidence Edinho had links to drug kingpin Ronaldo Duarte Barsotti, who is known as Naldinho and was arrested in the same sweep as Edinho and about 50 other people.

Police say they have recordings of phone calls in which Edinho spoke to Naldinho about how to invest money.

Pele, widely considered the finest footballer of all time and still a revered figure in Brazil, has said he will stand by his son.

The former Brazil number 10 wept publicly when he visited Edinho in jail after his arrest.



A file photo of Pele's son Edinho.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Real the richest

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid president Florentino Perez says the Spanish club has overtaken Manchester United as the biggest earner in world soccer.

"We have now ensured that our income is greater than any other team, it is the highest in the world," Perez said in an interview published in Spanish sports daily Marca on Friday.

"Only Manchester United are close to us, but this year we have overtaken them. We have solved our economic problems forever."

In a report published by consultants Deloitte in February, Manchester United topped the rich list for the eighth year in a row with an income of £171.5million for the 2003-2004 season.

Real were in second place with 156.3 million after halving the gap with United since the previous year. Italy's AC Milan were third and Chelsea fourth.

But Perez said that the situation had now changed and that Real's income had increased by 250 per cent since he took charge as president five years ago and that the club no longer had any debts.

He spent over 200 million euros (241.8 million dollars) in bringing a string of world class players including Luis Figo, Zinedine Zidane, Ronaldo, David Beckham and Michael Owen to the Bernabeu.

He funded the spending spree and cleared the club's debts when he sold its city centre training ground to the Madrid local authority for 480 million euros.

Perez said that in contrast to Manchester United and Chelsea, Real

enjoyed the advantage of not being controlled by a single owner but by the club's members.

"Every night I sleep soundly, safe in the knowledge that Real Madrid will not end up in the hands of any one particular person. Just ask Manchester and Chelsea about that."

"Their model (of ownership) has to be respected but it isn't suitable for Real Madrid."

United are controlled by American sports tycoon Malcolm Glazer and Chelsea by Russian oil billionaire Roman Abramovich.

With regard to Real's sporting fortunes, Perez said that the club's appeal had not been undermined by the fact that they have failed to win a major trophy in the past two seasons, but he did issue a warning to his players about their level of commitment. "We have had a problem in that we have believed that we could win our games without even getting off the team bus," he said.

"No one should forget that you win by battling it out and working hard. The idea that we can win merely by virtue of being Real Madrid doesn't hold."

"Last season we finished second and that was a failure for this club."

Real have added depth and defensive power to a side overburdened with attack-minded players by signing of Uruguayan duo Pablo Garcia and Carlos Diogo in the close season and Perez admitted that it was becoming increasingly difficult to sign world names.

"We always try to sign the best in the world but when you have signed Figo, Zidane and Beckham there aren't any more around. These sort of players only emerge once every few decades."

SL is double

FROM PAGE 12

showed improvement on our first tour although it came in the shorter version of the game. I think it could have been nice if we had played the Test series later and had bit of luck with coin tossing," he explained.

According to Whatmore the teenage pair of Mohammad Ashraful and Aftab Ahmed deserved plenty of praise for showing courage under fire at different times in the two-month tour.

"We have learned again how good a player Ashraful is. There was clear evidence that this boy can be very good in future. His hundred against Australia at Cardiff was a very natural innings. In fact, a few other innings he played was an indication that he is turning the corner, in other words the consistency looks like coming in him," said Whatmore.

"The problem is Ashraful and Aftab have all the shots in their arsenal that's why sometimes their innings ended too early. Look at Javed (Omar) he has limited shots that's why he tried to play within his limitation. It is easy to criticise two young players for their excessive shot-making but what we want from both Ashraful and Aftab is for them to understand their game," he said.

On the other hand, Whatmore aired on the side of caution while talking about left-handed opener Shahriar Nafees.

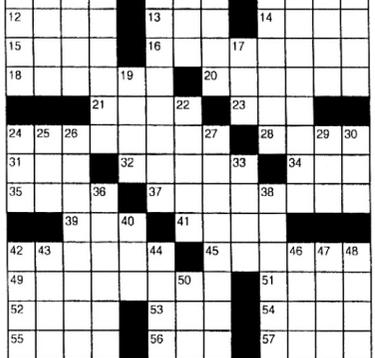
"It is nice to see some options in the opening spot but it would be unwise of us to say that Bangladesh had discovered a left-handed top-order batsman. But I was impressed with his comments in Friday's press conference in which he said that he would try his best to cement his place in the national side," he added.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	1 False god	5 Bribed	8 "Brian's Song" star	12 "Green Mansions" girl	13 Commotion	14 Heche or Hathaway	15 Slench	16 Black marks	18 Poured the tea	20 Prepares for painting	21 Census statistics	23 Teachers' org.	24 Bearing	28 Impale	31 Past	32 One of Donald's nephews	34 Inseparable	35 Information	37 Bill	39 Toe tally
2 Staffer	3 Cupid's torte	4 Potential pupae	5 Turned blue?	6 Praise for one	7 "— and Circumstance"	8 Dentist's case	9 Pixar employee	10 Initial chip	11 Capone	17 Sea eagle	19 "Zounds!"	22 Emulated	24 Leading man?	42 Tony of golf lore	44 Mime entrance	46 Pop choice	47 Valhalla VIP	48 Castle surroundings	50 Space-walk acronym	

Solution time: 24 mins.

C	A	M	O	S	A	M	A	L	A	G	A
M	I	M	O	S	E	L	L	I	N	O	R
A	N	I	M	A	L	S	L	E	D	G	E
P	E	R	M	A	L	S	O	R	O	D	
A	G	R	E	T	A	I	O				
O	W	E	L	I	M	P	S	P	I	T	
O	H	I	E	M	A	I	H	O	M	E	
P	O	O	R	S	T	R	E	V	A	N	
M	A	G	N	I	C	K					
A	S	A	L	O	G	S	A	P	O	P	
L	O	N	D	O	N	H	A	T	A	R	I
A	P	I	E	C	E						
S	H	A	R	K							
D	E	E	M	S							



CRYPTOQUIP

J B T W Y G R A K O Y Q X O G J Q C R Y M

G U K W O Y P X U C T K O Y M U J

X R C T Z . B T G U Q A Z Y ' J

M T J J B T A T O Z U Q J .

Saturday's Cryptoquip: I USUALLY SIT IN A TALL CHAIR WHENEVER I PLAY CARDS. THAT WAY I HAVE THE UPPER HAND.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: G equals C

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.